

Late Pleistocene
Archaeology & Ecology
in the Far Northeast



Edited by Claude Chapdelaine

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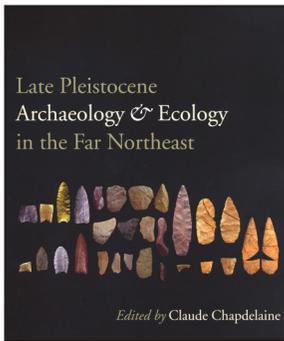
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Late Pleistocene Archaeology and Ecology in the Far Northeast

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Reviewed by Brad H. Koldehoff, Cultural Resources Unit, Illinois Department of Transportation, Springfield, Illinois.

The “Far Northeast” as defined by the authors in this edited volume encompasses the New England states and neighboring Maritime Provinces of Canada. This rugged, glaciated peninsula is delineated by the St. Lawrence River on the west, the Atlantic Ocean on the north and east, and the Hudson River Valley on the south. This peninsula, like other regions of North America, was colonized by fluted-point groups that routinely traveled hundreds of kilometers to hunt and retool at specific lithic sources. But what makes this region different, particularly its northernmost provinces, is that fluted-point groups may have still been hunting caribou in tundra-like conditions while further to the south and west contemporaneous groups were shifting to new point styles and forging new lifeways in the midst of emerging Holocene ecosystems. Moreover, there is limited but growing evidence of fluted-point groups in the Far Northeast may have targeted sea mammals and other marine resources, in addition to caribou and other more traditional terrestrial resources.

This nicely illustrated volume will be of great interest to all Paleoindian researchers for two reasons. First, it provides new information and regional context about such well-known Paleoindian sites as Debert in Nova Scotia, Vail in Maine, Bull Brook in Massachusetts, Reagen in Vermont, and West Athens Hill in New York. Second, it provides a substantive review of important new site excavations and regional surveys. For example, several authors discuss the newly discovered Cliche-Rancourt site, the first and only fluted-point site documented in Quebec.

Why should Paleoindian researchers in the Midwest be interested in this volume? Well, as Chris Ellis aptly points out in the Foreword, the studies published in this volume help to expose important differences and similarities between the Paleoindian records of the upper Midwest/Great Lakes and Far Northeast. While Ellis makes other keen observations, I have a problem with his contribution—it is too short. The real problem is not with Ellis’ contribution but with the lack of a proper overview chapter that pulls new and old information together within a regional framework that also compares and contrasts the Paleoindian record in the Far Northeast with the records in adjacent regions. The introductory chapter (Chapter 1) by Claude Chapdelaine and Richard Biosvert, is brief and provides minimal context, especially for the reader who is unfamiliar with Far Northeast. For instance, in Chapter 1 a map of the region showing the major sites and lithic sources discussed in the following chapters would have been helpful.

The volume is divided into two parts. In Part I, four chapters provide regional syntheses. Chapter 2 by Jon Lothrop and James Bradley is noteworthy because the authors provide an excellent overview of the exceptionally rich Paleoindian record found in and along the

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Hudson River valley in eastern New York. They also trace linkages to other sites in the Far Northeast through the presence of local and nonlocal raw materials. Chapter 5 by Arthur Spiess and colleagues is interesting because the authors explore the clustering of fluted-point sites across the Far Northeast and associated patterns of raw-material use.

Part II has six chapters that focus on individual sites or sites within specific locales. For example, Leah Morine Rosenmeier and colleagues in Chapter 6 examine site formation processes at the Debert site, and their results raise questions about the radiocarbon dating of this famous site. Brian Robinson in Chapter 9 revisits the issue of caribou hunting in relation to the placement of major habitation sites, like Bull Brook, and Francis Robinson in Chapter 10, examines site locations along the Champlain Sea in terms of not only caribou hunting but also the possibility of sea mammal hunting.

As noted by Ellis in the Foreword, Paleoindian studies in the Far Northeast, like those in other regions of North America, are plagued with the same problems: sites typically yield few if any faunal remains and limited numbers of radiocarbon samples are found in good association with Paleoindian assemblages. The latter problem is compounded by the very nature of carbon dating of samples from the Pleistocene-Holocene transition (e.g., so-called radiocarbon plateaus). Nonetheless, the chapters in this volume furnish fresh perspectives on the Paleoindian record in the Far Northeast by focusing on settlement patterns, landform age, site formation, raw-material procurement, and point typology. This volume is an important contribution to the archaeology of North America, and it should be in every Paleoindian researcher's library.